

## **Prescribing and Clinical Effectiveness Bulletin**

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### **PRESCRIBING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HAY FEVER: SPRING / SUMMER 2009**

#### **PACEF Recommendations**

- 1. The symptoms of hay fever can be controlled for the majority of patients for the majority of the time with one or more of: a non-sedating antihistamine, an intranasal steroid, anti-allergy eye-drops.**
- 2. Recommended medicines remain the same as in recent years:**
  - Non-sedating antihistamines: generic cetirizine 10mg or loratadine 10mg tablets**
  - Intra-nasal steroid: beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg, 200dose (N.B. prescribing Beconase aqueous nasal spray 50mcg, 200 dose offers a cost saving to the NHS)**
  - Anti-allergy eye-drops; generic sodium cromoglycate 2% eye-drops 13.5ml**
- 3. Routine use of higher-cost, non-sedating antihistamines, particularly levocetirizine and desloratadine instead of lower cost generic alternatives, may be considered to be an excessive or inappropriate use of NHS resources.**
- 4. Hay fever sufferers subject to prescription charges can purchase all the above items through pharmacies at a lower cost than the current prescription charge.**
- 5. Grazax (standard Timothy grass pollen allergen) is designated RED-RED and thus should not be prescribed by GPs. Secondary-care specialists may be able to prescribe Grazax by using the 'exceptional case' mechanism**

### Cost Comparison and Advice Summary

Recommended medicine	Dose	Price (Feb 09)	Do <b>NOT</b> prescribe as:
<b>Cetirizine tablets 10mg, 30 tablets</b>	1 tablet daily	96p (30)	Zirtek Allergy or any brand
<b>Cetirizine oral solution 5mg/5ml, 200ml</b>	5ml daily for children 2-6 years (Children over six: 10ml daily)	£2.24 (200ml)	
<b>Loratadine 10mg tablets, 30 tablets</b>	1 tablet daily	£1.24 (30)	There is no branded version of this drug. The original brand (Clarityn) was discontinued
<b>Beconase Aqueous Nasal Spray 50mcg 200dose</b>	Adults & children over 6: Two sprays in each nostril twice daily (2x2x2). Reduce to the minimum dose which controls symptoms (which may be once daily)	£2.19 (200 dose unit)	Beconase Hayfever Beconase Hayfever Relief Beconase 100 dose Beconase 180 dose Any other brand of beclometasone nasal spray
<b>Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 200 dose</b>	Adults & children over 6: Two sprays in each nostril twice daily (2x2x2). Reduce to the minimum dose which controls symptoms (which may be once daily)	£2.88 (200 dose unit)	Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 100 dose Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 180 dose
<b>Sodium Cromoglycate 2% Eye Drops 13.5ml</b>	Adult & child: 1 or 2 drops in each eye four times daily	£1.56 (13.5ml)	Sodium Cromoglycate 2% Eye Drops 10ml Opticrom, Hay-Crom, Vividrin Or any brand
<b>Second-line agents</b>			
Budesonide 100mcg metered pump nasal spray 200 dose	Adults only: 2 sprays in each nostril once daily. Maintenance 1 spray in each nostril once daily	£5.90 (200 dose unit)	
Mometasone 50mcg metered pump nasal spray 140 doses	Adults: 2 sprays in each nostril once daily (can be increased to 4 sprays in each nostril once daily). Maintenance 1 spray in each nostril once daily. Child over six: 1 spray in each nostril once daily.	£7.83 (140 dose unit)	

### Hayfever medicines offering poor value for money to the NHS

Medicines for hay fever other than those listed above, offer poorer value for money to the NHS. Of particular concern are **desloratadine (Neoclarityn)** and **levocetirizine (Xyzal)**, a major metabolite and a stereo isomer respectively of the originator brand products, loratadine (Clarityn) and cetirizine (Zirtek), designed to extend the patent life of the original brands.

**Desloratadine** is the major metabolite of loratadine. Both loratadine and desloratadine have antihistaminic activity. Loratadine has a half-life of 8.4 hours; desloratadine has a half-life of 28 hours. There are no head-to-head randomized controlled trials of the two drugs, but, bearing in mind that desloratadine is given at half the dose compared to loratadine, the two drugs appear to be sufficiently similar to interchange. Schering-

Plough (the original manufacturer) discontinued loratadine before patent expiry resulting in switching from loratadine to desloratadine. Switching from desloratadine to loratadine is recommended. The basic NHS price of desloratadine is £7.04 for 30 tablets.

**Levocetirizine** is the active enantiomer of cetirizine. Cetirizine is a racemate (i.e. an equal mixture of left and right handed enantiomers of a chiral molecule). As such, the pharmacological activity of levocetirizine at half the dose would be expected to be comparable to that of cetirizine. Switching from levocetirizine to cetirizine is recommended. The basic NHS price of levocetirizine is £4.39 for 30 tablets.

Other higher cost non-sedating antihistamines such as **fexofenadine (Telfast)** and **mizolastine (Mizollen)** are considered to be equally poor value for money.

### **Hayfever medicines available without prescription**

Most of the recommended hay fever medicines are available without prescription.

Cetirizine and loratadine are available in packs of 7 for self-selection in pharmacies or other retailers. The generic versions are typically £1.00 to £1.50, but may be subject to offers such as three packs for the price of two. Brands are more expensive.

Cetirizine and loratadine are also available in packs of 30, but only through pharmacies at the medicines counter. Generic versions may be between £2 and £4; offers may also be available.

Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 200 dose is available through pharmacies at the medicines counter for £3 to £4. The branded Beconase versions are not good value at £6.06 for the 100 dose version and £9.09 for the 180 dose version.

Sodium Cromoglycate 2% Eye Drops are available at the medicines counter at pharmacies and are typically available in 5ml, 10ml and 13.5ml sizes in prices from £3 to £5. Generic or 'own-label' versions are likely to be the least expensive.

### **Grazax**

Grazax (a once daily fast melting sublingual tablet containing standardized allergen extract of Timothy grass pollen) remains RED-RED. In exceptional circumstances, a hay fever sufferer can be referred to a secondary-care specialist for assessment.

## Further Cost Comparisons

### Non-sedating antihistamines

	Cost for 30 days
<b>Loratadine (generic) 10mg tablets</b>	<b>£1.18</b>
<b>Cetirizine (generic) 10mg tablets</b>	<b>£0.96</b>
Cetirizine (Zirtek Allergy) 10mg tablets	£8.12
Desloratadine 5mg tablets (Neoclarityn)	£7.04
Fexofenadine 120mg tablets (Telfast)	£5.99
Mizolastine 10mg MR tablets (Mizollen)	£5.77
Levocetirizine 5mg tablets (generic/Xyzal)	£4.39
	Cost per pack
Levocetirizine 500 mcg/ml solution (200ml) (Xyzal)	£6.00
Loratadine (generic) 5mg/5ml syrup (100ml)	£5.16
<b>Cetirizine (generic) 5mg/5ml soln (200ml)</b>	<b>£2.24</b>
Desloratadine 2.5mg/5ml oral soln (100ml) (Neoclarityn)	£7.04

### Intra-nasal steroids

	Unit cost	No of doses
<b>Beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg</b>	<b>£2.88</b>	<b>200</b>
Beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg (Beconase Hayfever)	£5.54	180
<b>Beconase (beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50 mcg)</b>	<b>£2.19</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Nasobec (beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg)</b>	<b>£2.43</b>	<b>200</b>
Budesonide 100 mcg / spray	£5.90	200
Flunisolide aqueous nasal spray 25mcg / spray (Syntaris)	£5.05	240
Fluticasone 50mcg /spray (Flixonase)	£11.23	150
(Nasofan Allergy)	£4.68	60
Triamcinolone 55 mcg/spray (Nasacort)	£7.39	120
Mometasone 50mcg/spray (Nasonex)	£7.83	140

### Anti-allergy eye drops

Trade name	Generic name	size	Unit cost
-	<b>Sodium cromoglicate 2%</b>	<b>13.5ml</b>	<b>£1.56</b>
Rapitil	Nedocromil 2%	5ml	£4.92
Zaditen	Ketotifen 0.25mg/ml	5ml	£9.75
Alomide	Lodoxamide 0.1%	10ml	£5.31
Emadine	Emedastine 0.5mg/ml	5ml	£7.45
Hay-Crom	Sodium cromoglicate 2%	13.5ml	£1.61
Opatanol	Olopatadine 0.1%	5ml	£3.98
Opticrom	Sodium cromoglicate 2%	13.5ml	£8.03
Optilast	Azelastine 0.05%	8ml	£6.40
Relestat	Epinastine 0.5mg/ml	5ml	£9.90
Vividrin	Sodium cromoglicate 2%	13.5ml	£10.95

(Preferred agents are highlighted in bold)

### Further reading

'Common questions about hay fever', *MeReC Bulletin* 2004; 14(5): 17 – 20

'Oral antihistamines for allergic disorders', *DTB* 2002; 40(8): 59 – 62

'Grass pollen allergy extract', *UKMI New Medicines Profile*, issue number 07/01, February 2007

*PACE Bulletin*, Volume 2, No1, January 2008

*PACE Bulletin*, Volume 2, No4, April 2008

Prices from *Drug Tariff*, Feb 2009 and [www.cddata.co.uk](http://www.cddata.co.uk) Feb 2009.

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